

# The INQUIRER

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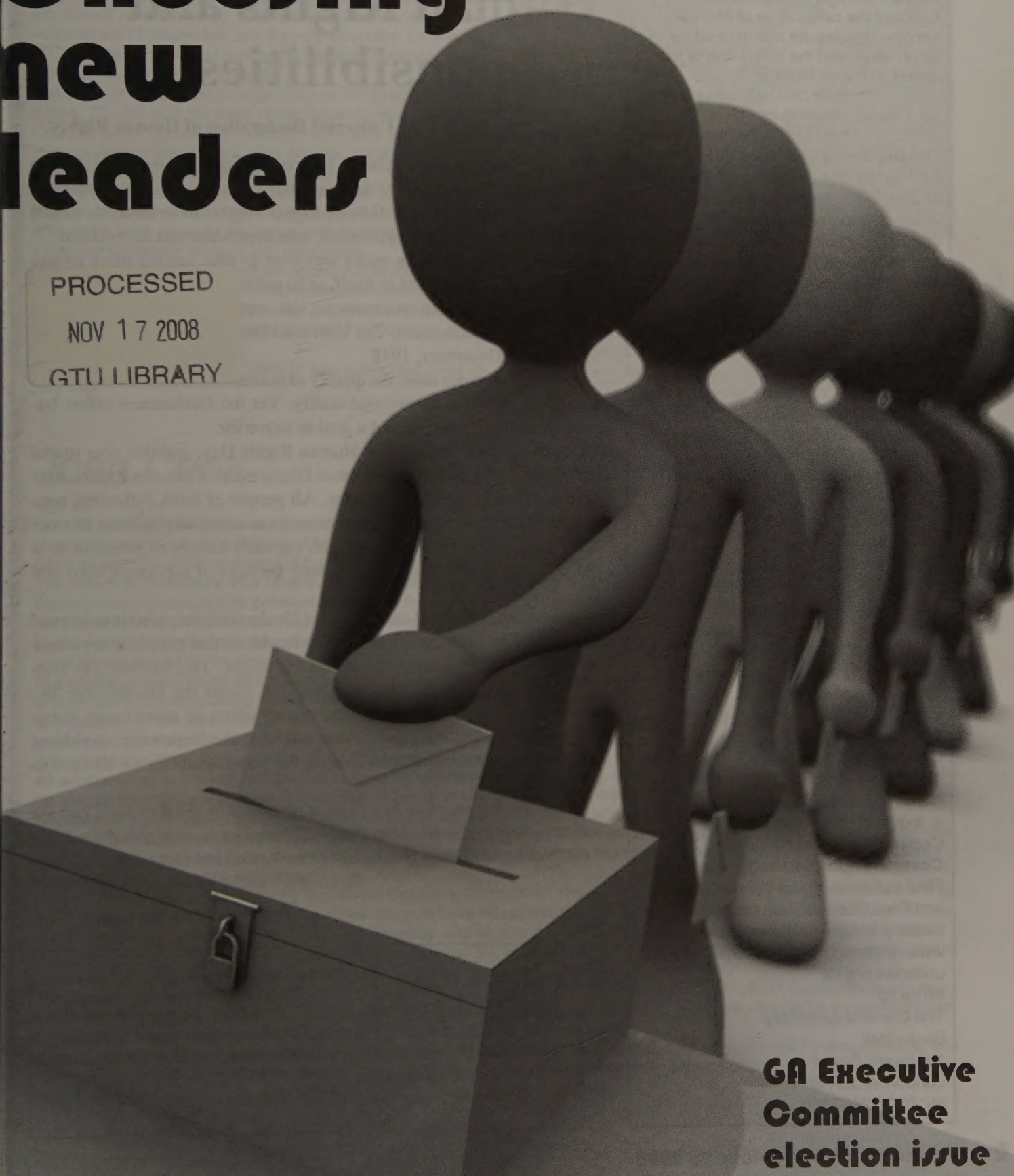
The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7710 November 15 2008

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**GA Executive  
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election issue**



# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest  
Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the  
General Assembly of the Unitarian and  
Free Christian Churches 2001*

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## Inquiring Words

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples, no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.

— the Dalai Lama

## Human Rights and Responsibilities

### 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

One of the first tasks the United Nations set itself on its foundation in 1945 was the formulation of the principles upon which it would operate: a Universal Declaration of Human Rights – rights to be understood and guaranteed as universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

None of these precious rights was ever to take second place to any other, however important in itself, or to political expediency.

This must have been an enormous task, yet no greater than the scope of the resulting document. The Universal Declaration was formally adopted on 10 December, 1948.

Sadly, six decades later, the quality of human life it undertook to make possible is still not a universal reality. Yet the Declaration offers humanity an abiding vision and a goal to strive for.

December 10th each year is Human Rights Day, and this year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, now affirmed by 171 signatory nations. All people of faith, following conscience over custom and convenience, have cause to celebrate this occasion, especially we Unitarians with our early history of persecution in the cause of free religion and our long heritage of espousing civil and religious liberty.

Those who originated the Universal Declaration intended it to be read and studied in schools throughout the world, so that people everywhere would grow up 'owning' it as their birthright. This has not yet happened. Indeed, Amnesty International has called the Declaration 'the world's best kept secret'. This anniversary offers an opportunity to begin letting the secret out – by learning what the Rights are, exploring their implications and acknowledging the responsibilities we all have to keep them alive.

*From the introduction to a service prepared by the Rev Joy Croft for distribution by the Worship Panel. The service is available from Martin Gienke: [martin@gienke.net](mailto:martin@gienke.net) or write to Icen Cottage, 46 Church St, Gt Wilbraham, Cambridge CB21 5JQ*

## In the next issue

Exciting things are happening at the Todmorden Unitarian Church, including the the annual Christmas Carol event, arranged this year for Thursday 4 December at 7.30pm. The church is located at Honey Hole, Todmorden, Lancashire.

See the full story in the next issue of *The Inquirer*.



# Electing a new Executive Committee

Two years ago, following a lengthy consultation process, the Executive Committee of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches was established and its inaugural members elected.

It is time now to cast ballots for the Executive Committee of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. All quota-paying members should receive ballots through their congregations which will then be returned to Popularis. Ballots should be returned by 13 December. Results will be announced on 17 December and the new Executive Committee (EC) will meet for the first time at the General Assembly Meetings planned for Chester in April.

There are 11 candidates for eight slots on the Executive Committee. The EC took the place of the larger General Assembly Council, which comprised members from all the geographic districts around the country. This smaller, collaborative body now sets policy for the General Assembly.

Four incumbents are among the 11 candidates, who come from England, Scotland and Wales. Some are lifelong Unitarians and some have come to the movement more recently. They represent a diversity of views and experience.

All the candidates were offered the opportunity to answer some questions from 'The Inquirer'. Word limits were adhered to, and all the candidates' materials are laid out identically and in alphabetical order. All 11 candidates availed themselves of the opportunity.

So, take a look at what they have to say, make your mind up and vote.

— MC Burns



Members of the current Executive Committee at the 2008 General Assembly meetings, held in March 2008. Photo by John Hewerdine

**Put further questions to the candidates on the General Assembly web site <http://www.unitarian.org.uk/>**

## Joan Cook

Age: 55

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **St. Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **I joined the Unitarian Church 27 years ago.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement?

**The ethos of 'tolerance and reason' is the underlying strength of the Unitarian & Free Christian movement, but its greatest strength is the membership. The wealth of experience, the commitment, positivity, the respect for others and the richness of diversity to be found in our communities is our strength!**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement?

**Our challenges are those which face most religious communities; decreasing membership and income, but increasing costs. These need to be addressed, but one of our greatest challenges, is the question of spiritual leadership, supporting those we do have and encouraging those who feel they have something to offer the movement.**

Why would you like to be a member of the Executive Committee? **We must all be prepared to**

**do what we can to ensure our Church is here for our children, and others, in the future. As a member of the EC, I would be able to contribute in this, as well as the direction in which our movement is going.**

What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring?

**My most recent, and present, experience, both professionally and as a member of our Church, has involved a great deal of 'advocacy' work, and, as a result of this, I feel I would be able to use these representational skills, in particular, as a member of the Executive Committee.**

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **The current EC has done a great job in establishing, itself, its role and the various Commissions. We now have an excellent base on which to develop the roles of EC members, the commissions, as well as our future governance, and enable the Unitarian movement to move forward and grow.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement?

**The current Executive Committee has improved the liaison between the Districts and the EC, but I would like to see more information regarding the decision making process, as well as the decisions made, available directly to the membership. Perhaps by way of a 'Feedback Column' in The Inquirer?**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **I should like to see more staff available to advise on, and facilitate, initiatives in local communities and Districts.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Aspirational.**



Joan Cook



## Jim Corrigall

Age: 60

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Golders Green Unitarians, London.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **Five years**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **That it offers an open, creedless faith which welcomes people of differing beliefs and encourages them to discover value and meaning for themselves. That it contains and celebrates both doubters and believers, and that it encourages a free and creative approach to worship.**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **We need to make ourselves better known, so more people become aware of what we offer. It's difficult to gain national media coverage, but it's a priority, and we won't do so unless we are prepared to take risks. Finally, we must ensure our staff have excellent working conditions.**

Why would you like to be a member of the Executive Committee? **I am keen to help the Executive focus on what is most important, including allocating resources wisely. The EC cannot do everything itself, but it needs to establish priorities while encouraging and supporting good work throughout our denomination.**

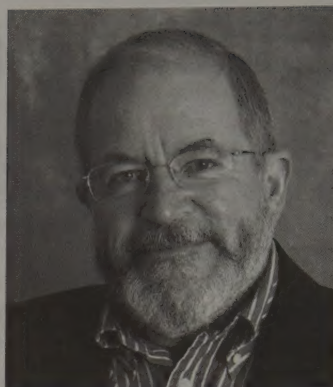
What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **I've been a journalist for 35 years, in national newspapers and at the BBC. I was an executive member of the National Union of Journalists for nine years, including serving as President. My strengths are media awareness and strategic leadership.**

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **Excellent – they've worked very hard to establish the Executive from scratch, to define priorities and set about tasks. But the incoming Executive must consider matters anew. Its job will be to provide strategic leadership while avoiding taking on too much of the work itself.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement? **Yes, I am in favour of more open communication between the Executive and the rest of our denomination, including through making EC agendas and minutes available to the membership.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **First, a media officer. Second, a social responsibility officer. We need to become more visible and more socially involved.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Committed.**



Jim Corrigall

## Elisabeth (Lis) Dyson-Jones

Age: 65

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Cardiff Unitarians.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **All my life. Originally I was a member of Pendleton Unitarian Church (MDA); later Great Meeting, Leicester and Upper Chapel, Sheffield.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement?

**Its history and its continued focus on community, Ministry and growth. The ideal of being the light of free religious inquiry and its encouragement to all to think for themselves.**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **Belief in ourselves and having the courage to create an environment of trust to enable us to unleash the power of who we are and what we can become. Remembering that synthesis is the prime value and that trust and fear cannot live side by side.**

Why would you like to continue as a member of the Executive Committee? **Having been part of the hard-working, committed current EC, I would like to continue with the work that has begun. I would remain committed to the specific needs of Wales and work to ensure ALL our Unitarian communities could thrive and not just survive.**

What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **I have worked collaboratively at both national and congregational levels, being a member of DSC and CAP, SOL and Welsh Department Panels and past Chair of Cardiff Unitarians. I support three district associations as EC Link and I am a past President South East Wales District.**

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **It has been a committed team working through an extensive agenda in a systematic and collaborative way. It has acted responsibly, working without ego, each member having had respect for one another. A great deal has been achieved but there is still work to be completed.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement? **It may be more beneficial to produce a synopsis for general readership, on a regular basis. I think this would be more worthwhile for the majority of Unitarians.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **Continued investment of staff in Finance, Information Technology and Communication.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Focused.**



Lis Dyson-Jones -- incumbent



# Dot Hewerdine

Age: 61

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Chorley Unitarian Chapel & Nazareth Unitarian Chapel, Padiham.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **61 years – born into a Unitarian family.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **Encouragement to ask questions and seek understanding from all sources in an accepting and caring community. Commitment to equality, liberty of conscience and social justice.**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement?

**Making Unitarian communities visible and accessible to people looking for support on their spiritual journeys. We must develop trust and respect within our communities to give us confidence in what we are and offer. People will not stay if their experiences do not live up to our promises!**

Why would you like to continue as a member of the Executive Committee? **I would like to offer continuity during the transition from the 1st Executive to the new Executive through my understanding & experience of collaborative leadership. Positive strategies & action plans are now in place & I would like to contribute to the next stage of progressing these towards fruition.**

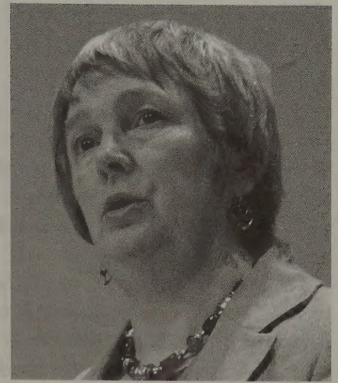
What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **Being on the Executive Committee during its formative 1st term and Chairing the Denominational Support Commission, gives me the experience and skills to support the next stage of Growth & Renewal. I am committed to open consultation & have skills & experience of managing change at personal & organisational levels.**

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **The 1st EC had the difficult task of establishing effective working practices, taking account of the needs of members and the requirements of legal & charitable law, within the restraints of available staff time, finance and, especially, volunteer contributions. As 'pioneers', the EC have effectively paved the way forward.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement? **There is always a need to develop communications & the EC has worked hard at doing this through District Links, Roadshows and other face-to-face 2-way processes which are more effective at building trust than papers. However, agendas could be made available as are key messages and decisions.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **Finance, IT, support for individuals, congregations & districts, and human resources are all areas in need of additional staff time.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Hope-full!**



*Dot Hewerdine -- incumbent*

# Andrew Pakula

Age: 50

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Student Pastor to Newington Green and Islington Unitarians.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **15 years.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **Today, millions have rejected traditional dogmatic religion and yet crave spirituality and meaning in life. We offer the answer they seek with freedom of belief grounded in deep tradition and loving community. If challenges are overcome, Unitarianism can be one of the most relevant religious movements of our times.**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **Our movement is virtually invisible to the public. Additionally, many of our congregations have dwindled such that they lack the ability to regenerate themselves. We must let the world know that we are here and mount a robust effort to rebuild our congregations as vital centres of spiritual life.**

Why would you like to be a member of the Executive Committee? **Unitarianism changed my life for the better and I want to offer to others what I found. I feel that I have the skills and experience to help lead our movement through the significant challenges that face us and toward the great promise of growth, relevance, and service.**

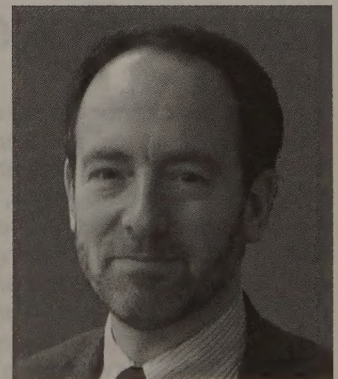
What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **I have extensive secular and religious expertise. I earned an advanced degree in business administration and led a variety of secular organisations. I had a decade of experience and training in congregational leadership and growth and have for two years been student pastor to one of our fastest growing congregations.**

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **The EC has worked hard and can do better by focusing more on the big picture: The EC should set vision and goals and grant more authority and responsibility to the capable staff and volunteers. It should encourage initiative to support what is best in our movement, wherever it arises.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement? **Building necessary trust requires open, honest communication. EC proceedings should be public, excepting rare occasions when confidential matters are considered.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **To meet our goals of visibility and congregational renewal, growth expertise and media relations would be high on my list.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Enthusiasticcapable.**



*Andrew Pakula*



# Rev Dr Ann Peart

Age: 65

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **All my life; active for about 50 years.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **It has the potential to meet people's need for spiritual community, starting from their own experience, and mediated through a tradition of free-thinking dissent and concern for social justice and religious quest.**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **Challenges include both external conditions such as a secular, post-modern consumerist society, and internal factors such as our smallness, our fragmented communities, and a name which is often misunderstood. Our diversity is both a challenge and a delight.**

Why would you like to continue as a member of the Executive Committee? **I have been a member of the EC since its inception, and am inspired by its collaborative and committed working style. I would like to be a part of its continuing development now that so much of the ground work has been done.**

What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **Experience of the EC, several GA commissions, committees and panels (including RE, Social Responsibility, currently chair of Ministry Commission. As principal of Unitarian College, an in-depth knowledge of skills and vocation needed for ministry and other leadership roles, extensive knowledge of the movement in various parts of the UK.**

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **It has spent much time putting proper processes into place, but the fruits of this are not yet obvious. The system of link people with all the different districts (I visit both districts in Wales on a regular basis) enlarges the EC's sensitivity and knowledge of the movement.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement? **I support good communication between all parts of the movement. The roadshows and link people provide personal contact which can be more effective than written communication. I would be pleased to see more detailed reports of the EC's work distributed widely.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **Congregational support, financial management, communications and outreach (including IT development and back up), social justice work.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Committed.**



Ann Peart -- incumbent

# Louise Rogers

Age: 54

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Newcastle-under-Lyme Unitarian Meeting House.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **10 years.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **Small, democratic, open, caring, creative, powerful, faithful, spirited, respecting, friendly, welcoming, thinking, feeling, inclusive, hopeful, exciting ...**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement?

- **Understanding the GA role as a national organisation which is different to its role in supporting its members;**
- **Developing real partnerships with other Unitarian organisations;**
- **Identifying where the GA needs to lead and where it needs to follow; and**
- **Thinking big, dreaming bigger and acting boldly.**

Why would you like to be a member of the Executive Committee? **To make things happen. I**

**love Unitarianism and I believe that we could be so much more. I enjoy working with others to achieve excellence. I am frustrated by what I see as the ineffective use and misdirection of time, effort and resources at the national level.**

What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **Chairing a voluntary organisation for over 20 years and seeing it becoming what it was truly meant to be – with people happy in their work, happy in their volunteering, with high-quality, effective service delivery. Strengths = understanding and liking people and organisations; fairness; courage; integrity; and wisdom.**

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **They have worked hard, done a lot of talking and have kept very quiet about their achievements. I think that, as a body, it has not engaged with critics, has not made the best use of all our skills and has needed higher aspirations.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement? **Of course! But empowerment is about being in control of your own destiny, not being told what others are doing for you. EC members are trustees of the General Assembly, not of British Unitarianism. The EC needs to work in partnership with others to co-create our present and our future.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **People anywhere developing ... woodland burial schemes; national magazine 'Spirit and Society'; gap-year programmes; spiritual counselling service; Internet radio station.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Yes.**



Louise Rogers



# Peter Soulsby

Age: 59

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Leicester Unitarians – Great Meeting.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **About 15 years.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement?

**About fifteen years ago I discovered that I had been a Unitarian all of my adult life. I want those many thousands of people like us out there to have the same chance of discovering they too are Unitarians and to become part of our Community.**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **I want us to be as confident of our future as we are proud of our past.**

Why would you like to continue as a member of the Executive Committee? **Being a member of the Executive Committee is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. It is a real joy to be part of such a committed team. We've started so much that is exciting, refreshing and uplifting. These are promises that now need to be delivered.**

What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **I'm a member of the new Executive Committee and act as its Convenor. I was a Special Needs Teacher; Leader of Leicester City Council for 17 years; served on the Audit Commission and was Vice Chair of British Waterways.**

My 'day job' is as MP for Leicester South.

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **Inevitably, we've made some mistakes as we've begun our work but we have much to be pleased about. A collaborative leadership that really works; new structures; appointing our Chief Executive; developing Action Plans and preparing the ground for Growth have taken a lot of our time. Every minute worthwhile!**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement? **The 'Roadshows' and 'District Link' have worked well to improve communication but there is much more to do – both amongst ourselves and with the wider world. Of course agendas and minutes should be available – but they're not a substitute for real communication. Face to face is so much better.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **We need to do still more to strengthen our services to the denomination. Communication; IT; and Finance all need investment.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Human.**



*Peter Soulsby -- incumbent*

# Alison Thursfield

Age: **mature**

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Bayshill, Cheltenham, part of the Cotswold Group.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **About 8 years.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **Openness and lack of dogma. We are not required to pay lip-service to the unbelievable; and a variety of approaches to the spiritual are all acceptable.**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **The need to develop our image so it becomes more widely known in this land, and to update some of our activities to resonate with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

Why would you like to be a member of the Executive Committee? **The wrong question because "like" does not enter into it. However, I am willing to serve the community as best I can – if required.**

What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **President of my District – the Midland Union – which I have represented at "District Connections", the "fm weekend" and at "GA" meetings. I am enthusiastic, can listen, and bring people together. I try to encourage ways for us to grow and move forward in unity.**

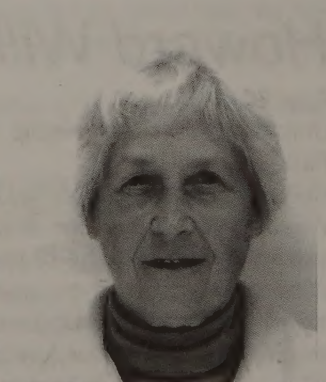
How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **They have set a very high standard by their commitment; and laid an imaginative foundation for the future of our movement. We must remember that "turning a ship around" takes time.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement?

**No! In my experience only confidentiality within a Committee will allow totally open and honest discussions. Having elected the EC, Unitarians must trust them to communicate as fully as is commensurate with confidentiality.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **The recent changes must be given time to settle. Any further additions must be agreed with the Chief Executive.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Perspicacious.**



*Alison Thursfield*



## David Usher

Age: 55

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Sevenoaks, London District.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **Lifelong.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **Our great strength is our unique message of personal authenticity within inclusive, open and generous-hearted community. All else flows from how well we articulate that central abiding strength.**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **To overcome the prevailing mood of pessimism, timidity and resignation to decline, and to rediscover belief in ourselves so that we make ourselves relevant to and engaged with the present. In other words, to rekindle a commanding sense of our purpose and ambition.**

Why would you like to be a member of the Executive Committee? **The most pressing need for British Unitarians is to have a cohesive and compelling larger vision for our shared future, based on an inspiring articulation of our theological foundations.**

What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **I was the original visionary, campaigner and then founding President of the International Council of Unitarians & Universalists. I was the original visionary and campaigner for the General Assembly to change its organisational structures. I see the big picture and have the skills and determination to realise it.**

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **They have been extremely busy, but have confused busyness with effectiveness and importance. The primary role of the Executive Committee is to make policy, not implement it. There has been a disappointing lack of direction, focus and purpose.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement? **Good communication is not about distribution of meeting agendas and minutes. What we need to communicate at all levels, to each other and to the world, is faith in our shared future. When we are doing that well, distributing minutes of meetings will be seen as an administrative detail.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **We don't need more staff at Essex Hall. We need more people doing good things at local level.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Impatient.**



David Usher

## Howard Wilkins

Age: 62

Unitarian church/fellowship membership: **Hinckley/Charnwood/National Unitarian Fellowship.**

How long have you been a Unitarian? **14 years.**

What do you see as the strengths of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **Its extremely wide range of the faiths that it embraces**

What do you see as the challenges faced by the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement? **To make the Unitarian movement more visible and to make it even more welcoming to a wider spectrum of faith communities.**

Why would you like to be a member of the Executive Committee? **I feel that it is a challenge to guide our faith community and that I have much to offer**

What is your most relevant previous experience for the post and what particular strengths/skills would you bring? **Having run my own company, I have learned much about administration and organisation. I have also learnt to problem solve, be persistent, and think creatively.**

How would you rate the job done by the current Executive Committee? **A very good basis to work from. A good job done well in difficult circumstances.**

Would you support more extensive communication between the EC and the membership of the movement – for instance, would you support open distribution of agendas and minutes among the membership of the movement? **Yes, there needs to be more communication between the EC and the movement in general, both via the printed word and electronically. Agendas and minutes I would think would be counterproductive; web-logs, newsletters and bulletins would be better.**

If the financial support were available, what priorities would you have for additional staffing at Essex Hall? **Permanent fulltime Youth Officer and a fulltime officer dedicated to getting our message across to the world.**

Describe yourself in one word: **Persistent.**



Howard Wilkins



# Stamp honours Eleanor Rathbone

By Alan Ruston

Eleanor Rathbone (1872-1946) is commemorated on one of a set of six Royal Mail stamps of significant British women which were issued on 14 October. Eleanor came from a line of Unitarians on both sides of her family, at a time in Liverpool when the name Rathbone was amongst its most celebrated. She was an independent MP from 1929 until her death and adopted many unpopular causes which the government of the day rarely supported. They included women's suffrage, women's pensions, the cause of women in India and across the empire. She also worked on behalf of refugees and of Jewish settlement in Palestine. It's said that when she was passing by, government spokesmen used to hide in corridors in the House of Commons in order to avoid her. Her main claim to fame is the signal role she played in achieving child benefit payments – a programme which had been resisted by successive governments.

The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* states that she was 'surrounded from childhood by strong-minded women and influenced by Quaker and Unitarian principles.' True, but the person who was the greatest influence on her was her father William Rathbone (1819-1902). He also was an MP for many years, and was a strong supporter of the Liberal Party, unlike his daughter, who would not join any political party. He was into every good work in Liverpool, and, being rich, could support his causes with money. A strong Unitarian, he was member of Renshaw Street Chapel, later Ullet Road, from the age of 10. A great admirer of Unitarian ministers James Martineau and J Hamilton Thom (who was also his brother-in-law) he was a fine example of Unitarian concern for the less well off. After the death of his first wife, he literally created the district nursing service in the area, so much so that Florence Nightingale stated he was 'one of God's best and greatest sons.'

These principles were those which Eleanor took over (she



Image courtesy of the Royal Mail. ©

wrote his biography) both on the Liverpool scene and nationally. He left her the money so that she could fulfil a pioneering social role. She remained a nominal Unitarian all her life but, after the First World War, she did not play a significant role in the movement. However, she exemplified all its best aspects so that *Oxford DNB* concludes that 'she stands as both the most significant feminist thinker and the most effective woman politician of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.' We should therefore be pleased with this recognition and be proud that she was such a fine exemplification of Unitarian social witness in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Alan Ruston is a member of the Watford Fellowship.

## Unitarian pin-up girls and propaganda

By Frank Hytch

Earlier this year *The Unitarian* published, a little belatedly, a book in celebration of its centenary.

The magazine was launched in 1903 by the Rev Harry Bodell Smith, then minister of Mottram, and remained his sole responsibility for 26 years. Including him, there have been no more than seven editors of the magazine in its first 100 years or so, four of whom are still living.

The first two, Bodell Smith and Arthur Vallance, spanned 55 years, with the latter serving in the role for a record 29 years. The first five editors were Unitarian ministers.

The book includes sections covering each editorial period. They each begin with a piece by the editor concerned. Our distinguished Unitarian Historian Alan Ruston introduces the sections dedicated to the three editors who have died. Each of these is followed by material published during his period, conveying something of the attitudes and the flavour of the movement during his time. These extracts range from Post Card propaganda to a Unitarian pin-up girl. Two of the longest items merit a special mention. The first, from the earliest period, is a description of the Unitarian Van Mission, one of Harry Bodell Smith's major enthusiasms. At its peak, there were up to four of these vans travelling up

and down the country, acting as a base for holding meetings – mostly in the open air – in many locations, with the prime object of propagating and spreading Unitarianism. This enterprise came to an end in 1914, as the war began. Can you imagine anything like this happening today?

The other is a major article written by one of our greatest and most revered ministers, the Rev Margaret Barr. In this, she gives a full and clear account of her approach to the Khasi Hills Unitarians in India, and of her pioneering work with them over a quarter of a century.

Overall, a progression can be seen from an emphasis on Unitarian propaganda to the present focus on news of congregations and individuals in the movement, in this country and, to a degree, worldwide. The book offers glimpses both of the character and concerns of its editors and of changes and developments in Unitarianism over the last 100 years.

Copies of the book, entitled *The Unitarian – a Journey* (94 pages) are available from Business Manager Liz Shaw, Meadow Hey, Adlington Lane, Grindleford, Derbyshire S32 2HT at £5.71 including p&p. (cheques to 'The Unitarian'). It would provide an excellent Christmas gift for anyone with some interest in our history.

Frank Hytch is editor of *The Unitarian*.



# Simon John Barlow is terribly missed

*This is a tribute offered at the funeral of the Rev Simon John Barlow.*

**By Vernon Marshall**

Simon John Barlow was firstly a student of science. Attending Nottingham University from 1978, he gained a BSc degree before studying in Cardiff for his Post Graduate Certificate in Education. He was an exemplary teacher. Those of us who have sat at his feet at Unitarian Summer School and in congregational RE courses will know of his incredible teaching skills, his unusual ability to convey ideas in a powerful way.

In 1995, he began training for the Unitarian ministry after many years of commitment, through his family, to the Unitarian movement. His two years at the Unitarian College were notable in various ways. Firstly, he made a deep connection with his fellow students. He made a lasting impression on them and I know that there are fellow former students who became his lifelong admirers and who are deeply devastated by his death.

Secondly, and this is typical of Simon John, he knew best about how his studies should be organised. The College authorities at the time could not tie him down to schedules and routines that he felt were not appropriate to his learning regime. He had a vision as to how his two years of study should proceed and he followed that vision regardless.

Thirdly, Simon John brought to his student years a very unusual perspective on religious practice, unusual in Unitarian terms, but a perspective that is now connecting with many of us in the movement who are less tied to the traditional rationalism of mainstream Unitarianism. In other words, he was deeply spiritual. He had a very rock solid certainty about the spiritual world that came from his spiritual experience rather

than something based on rational thought. For many of us in the Unitarian movement, it was a breath of fresh air.

Simon John qualified from College, having also studied at Chester College, and took up his one full-time appointment in Shrewsbury, which also included ministry of the Wolverhampton congregation. In the last eight years, he did not have a full-time position, but did inspire and excite a number of congregations as a part-time interim minister. The love and admiration that he elicited at Hale and Dean Row, for example, is exemplified by the inclusion of him in the Roll of Ministers on the chapel wall at the back, where his name sits among all the great worthies from long ago. Simon John put 100 per cent effort into his interim ministries, as he did with everything. He exhausted himself. His work was never recognised by the movement nationally as his arrangement with congregations was always private. He was urged to undergo official interim training. But, Simon John being the independent-minded person that he was, resisted. Talk to anybody from those congregations and learn what excellent work he did. One chapel member told me, "I learnt more about spirituality from Simon John in a few months than from all my years in the pews".

Because of the great effort he would put in, I do not think that he could have held down a full-time ministry. He did not know how to rein back and ease off. Simon John was also a permanent feature of the annual Summer School in Great Hucklow. Words are inadequate to describe his contributions. The research for his talks was of a very high quality. His delivery was very impressive, full of humour, of personal reflections, of insightful illustrations. I remember taking part in one

*(Continued on next page)*

## GA Weekend a great success in Wales

**By Ceu Llwyd**

Anneddwen is a newly built house located in the centre of Llanwnnen village. Translated into English, it means White Dwelling. On Saturday, 11 October, it couldn't have been much busier at the White House in Washington. The owners, Ann and Alan Jones, decided to hold an open day at their home as part of the GA weekend. Unitarians, friends and supporters were warmly welcomed. Ann, who attended this year's Unitarian General Assembly conference at Hatfield and has since become an Associate Member, wanted to play her part to raise the profile of the GA's role and contribution in Ceredigion.

Alan's family have been active Unitarians for generations. He married Ann, a local girl whose father was Congregationalist and whose mother came from a Unitarian background extending back a number of generations. Her grandmother and grandfather were devoted Unitarians. Her grandmother was one of 10 children and have all been buried in Bwlchfadfa Unitarian Chapel's graveyard. Her grandfather was one of six children and was buried in the graveyard at Pantydefaid Unitarian chapel. As a child, she attended a Congregationalist chapel located within the 'Black Spot' of Ceredigion, half a mile away from Pantydefaid Unitarian chapel. But there is no doubt of her Unitarian roots. After they married, Ann became a member with her husband's family at Pantydefaid thus keeping to the strong Unitarian family connections.

More than 150 people attended the open day. Nearly 30 people, ranging from 11-years-old upwards, volunteered to assist



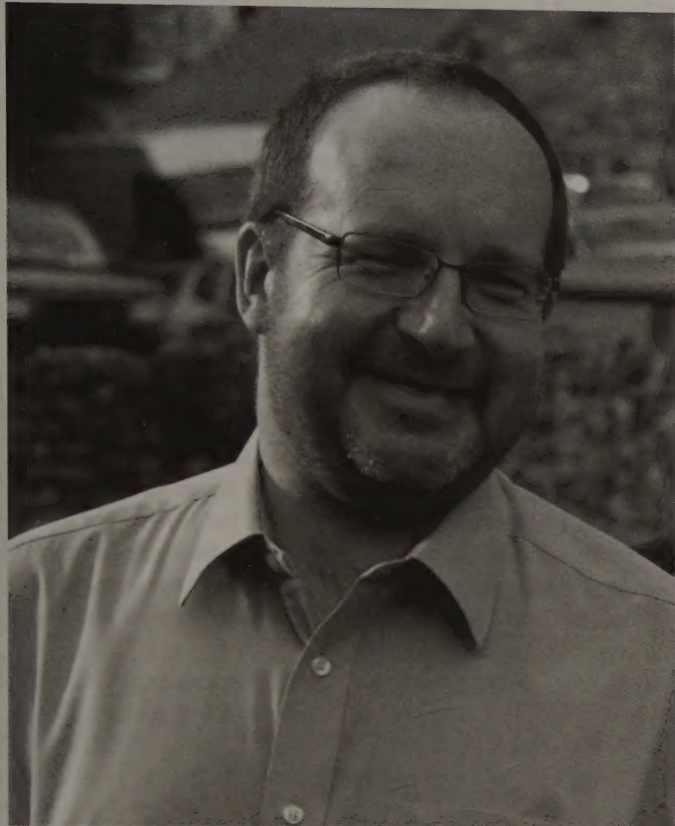
*Alan and Ann Jones together with both Ceredigion ministers, the Revs Wyn Thomas and Ceu Llwyd presenting the cheque to the Rev Eric Jones, secretary of the Welsh Department.*

with the day's activities. They arranged parking, took entry fees, sold raffles, staffed various stalls, served cawl (Welsh broth) and cakes as well as washing up. Equipment was readily loaned. In total, £1,450.13 was raised and at the close of the activities, a cheque was handed over to the Rev Eric Jones, Secretary of the Welsh Department, who, in turn, ensured that

*(Continued on back page)*



# Tributes to a man of faith and of love



*The Rev Simon John Barlow at Summer School 2008. Photo by Jim Blair*

Back in 2004 Kensington Unitarians had been without a minister for several months, and there was a vague feeling of unhappiness in the congregation. A committed and dedicated management committee ensured that there was a good service every Sunday and activities during the week, but the congregation had dwindled. It was hard to get prospective members to return after their first visit, and, as someone told me forlornly, we didn't really feel 'looked after' without a minister of our own. The congregation did not feel united or particularly positive when Simon John came to visit for six weeks.

For those few weeks the church was just infused with love and care. There has probably never been a minister better able to provide a service of real spiritual, even theological, depth in a warm coat of entertainment. The Sunday services were enthralling. In between, we had a rich programme of workshops and activities, all designed to bring us together and help us to rediscover our identity as a community. I know that I am among many people who see those six weeks as a turning point for our congregation. Simon John came to a congregation that was, if not weak, at least weakened; he left one that was strong and positive. For that we will always be thankful to him.

*Caroline Blair, chair of congregation, Kensington Unitarians*

## Donations

Donations in memory of the Rev Simon John Barlow will be shared between Dean Row Chapel and Old Chapel, Great Hucklow. They may be sent to Albert R Slack Ltd (Funeral Director), 84 South Oak Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 6AT Irene Barlow can be contacted at: 9 Vardon Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2AQ

## Simon John inspired with humour, insight

*(Continued from previous page)*

of his workshops, the creation of a nativity tableau, where we each took it in turn to take up the place of the Christ-Child and be adored. It is one of the most moving experiences I have ever had. Tears came to my eyes as I heard Simon John leading a group of people in expressing words of admiration and love. It was very moving and I shall always remember it.

Simon John was not just a great communicator. He had a rare faith. It would be wrong to describe what he had as "belief". For him it was certainty, but there was no arrogance or false piety. He just knew that the spiritual world existed. He lived with this happy knowledge that he was in touch with a spiritual reality that gave his life meaning. When he died, a colleague said to me that he was the one minister who would have had no fear whatsoever of death. This is one of the many ways in which I have been inspired by Simon John.

Simon John was more than this. He was good-natured, he had a great sense of humour, and he got on well with people of every kind. He loved people, and because of this, they loved him too. He was brilliant with children, but in many ways they felt that he was one of them. He was loyal to his friends and has left many bereft individuals behind. He adored his mum, Irene Barlow, and never went for long without speaking on the telephone or visiting her – even if it was to bring his dirty washing. Irene is such a lovely woman, and it feels so unjust that she has to suffer his loss.

Simon John, as many of us know, was not in the best of health. It was not his heart problems that worried his friends and family. He was a sufferer of clinical depression. He had se-

vere mood swings that isolated him from his friends and loved ones for long periods, when he would lock himself away. But he saw a positive side of that agony. It gave him insight into the minds of fellow sufferers and this insight allowed him to serve others. I also suffer from clinical depression that has at times brought me to the brink. Perhaps the worst time for me was about 12 years ago. I hardly knew Simon John then. He learned on the grapevine about my state of health. Out of the blue one day, I had a phone call from him giving me support. But he did not leave it at that. He called regularly for weeks and weeks. Other friends forgot after a while, but he did not. That is why I would never tolerate criticism of that often misunderstood but unique individual.

Simon John was a wonderful person to know. He touched the lives of many. He opened doors to the spiritual life for many people. His life was like a ray of sunshine on a cloudy day. To have known him was a privilege. Nobody could have known him without their life being affected. To those he loved, let us say that death is not the end. Our hearts tell us so in tones that cannot be denied. In some way we do not understand, Simon John is elsewhere, still connecting, still shining his light on others, still serving.

What we must do today is to commit ourselves to taking something of him with us throughout life, with all its ups and downs, its joys and sorrows, to show in all that we do and in all that we say that we were deeply privileged to have known that remarkable man known to us as Simon John Barlow.

*The Rev Dr Vernon Marshall is minister at Hale Barns and Dean Row chapels, Cheshire.*





Peter Soulsby welcomed a group of Unitarian teenagers and adults to the Palace of Westminster on 4 November. They had a general tour of the Houses of Commons and Lords, followed by a question-and-answer session. Photo by Gordon Lonsdale

## Open House held

(Continued from page 10)

the money was sent to the GA coffers. Thanks to the Bowland Trust, this sum will be doubled. Those were the simple facts, but behind it all there was a huge effort.

Llanwnnen is a small village in the county of Ceredigion, located three miles from Lampeter University Town. Within a mile from the village in both directions, there are two Unitarian chapels, Alltyblaca and Capel y Groes. Not too far away there are a total of 13 Unitarian chapels but what was achieved on the day can only be described as marvellous and incredible. All present sat down to their cawl, followed by tea and cakes. Some sat in different rooms in the house, even a bedroom was utilised as a dining room, while others dined in a special marquee erected for the occasion.

What is more amazing is that Ann managed all this despite her long illness from ME. For a total of seven years between 1991 and 1998, owing to the severity of her illness, she could not venture out of the house except for medical appointments. She was not expected to get better. But Ann managed to bounce back and to have the confidence to design and build the couple's special new house.

This was a unique event by quite an exceptional Unitarian couple, who took up the challenge and accomplished such a lot. Their generosity was infectious. For the sake of the GA, let's hope it is contagious and a lot of other people will catch it.

*The Rev Cen Llwyd is from Llandysul.*



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